

LOST MINERALS?

BURKE, E. A. J.

Chairman of the IMA-CNMMN, Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1085, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

E-mail: bure@geo.vu.nl

The **Commission on New Minerals and Mineral Names (CNMMN)** of the **International Mineralogical Association (IMA)** was established in 1959 for the purpose of controlling the introduction of new minerals and mineral names, and of rationalising mineral nomenclature. The CNMMN consists of representatives appointed by national mineralogical bodies (currently 30 voting members) and an executive committee consisting of chairman, vice-chairman and secretary. The CNMMN repartitions its workload amongst the three officers: the chairman prepares the new-mineral proposals, the vice-chairman handles the proposed changes to existing nomenclature (discreditations and redefinitions), and the secretary coordinates the subcommittees created to examine the nomenclature of mineral groups. The 30 members of the CNMMN evaluate all nomenclature proposals (new minerals, changes in existing minerals, mineral groups), and cast their votes on these, on a monthly basis for the new-mineral proposals, and as they come for the other proposals. About 70-80% of the members participate actively in the monthly new-mineral proposals, and about 60% in the others. The work of the CNMMN has gained since 1959 overwhelming support from the international mineralogical community.

The CNMMN handles about 50-60 new-mineral proposals per year (52 proposals in 2000, 70 in 2001, 57 in the first ten months of 2003). The CNMMN has voted on 300 new-mineral proposals in the period from January 1998 to October 2002. Approximately 80% of these were approved, the remainder being either rejected, or suspended pending further information. The CNMMN has also adjudicated in the same period 22 proposals to discredit, redefine or revalidate mineral species or to amend nomenclature in mineral groups (e.g., amphiboles, micas, zeolites). About 50% of these were approved, with the remainder being rejected, withdrawn or pending. Since 1959 the IMA-CNMMN has officially taken a decision on 3,500 or so minerals and mineral names on their approval, discreditation and/or redefinition. The list with these 3,500 or so decisions is available as a PDF file from the recently established IMA-CNMMN web site (www.geo.vu.nl/users/ima-cnmmn). This official IMA list only gives name, formula and one reference for each species; the reference supplied is for the published announcement of the CNMMN decision regarding the mineral's status, for new minerals usually the publication by their authors.

And here we have a first problem. According to the CNMMN procedures and guidelines (NICKEL & GRICE, 1998) authors of approved proposals (new minerals or

changes in existing nomenclature) should publish descriptions of the minerals covered by these proposals **within two years** of being notified of the approval by the chairman or the vice-chairman. This period of two years is probably too short, it is well known that it takes on average about one year from the submission of a manuscript to the appearance of the hard copy of a journal, a considerable delay due to the time needed for the peer review and the printing process. Of the 48 new minerals approved in 2000, only 24 have been published until November 2002.

But we have also much older new minerals that have not been published yet. According to several databases kept by CNMMN officials, we lack the publication of 30 or so minerals approved between 1988 and 1999. One of the CNMMN members (Michel Deliens of Belgium) regularly contacts the 'slow' authors by proxy of the chairman, and these actions sometimes result in the 'rescue' of these new minerals, which would otherwise be lost to our science.

A completely different case is represented by the phases on which research has been carried out, but that for some reason or other have never reached the stadium of submission to the CNMMN for approval, e.g., by lack of data asked for by the CNMMN. In many cases these phases are published as 'unnamed minerals', giving partial descriptions. The CNMMN has an active subcommittee working on an annotated list of these unnamed minerals published since 1960. Most of these published unnamed minerals, however, will never be fully characterised.

The present author has been involved between 1969 and 1977 in a cooperation with Slovak and Russian colleagues on an interesting phase on which the work has remained incomplete. It concerns a sulphosalt with a particular composition (Pb-Hg-Sb-S) from the locality Zenderling near Gelnica (Slovakia). Almost all work was ready, even X-ray work was carried out on the specially made synthetic equivalent of the mineral, but the final description was never submitted to the CNMMN, and only fragmentary descriptions have been published, although even recently with a name (HÁBER et al., 1999) not approved by the CNMMN.

References

- HÁBER, M., JELEN, S., KRIZÁNI, I., SOTÁK, J. & SPISIAK, J. (1999). Exkurzný sprievodca II, Banská Bystrica 21.-22.mája 1999.
NICKEL, E. H. & GRICE, J. D. (1998). Canadian Mineralogist, 36: 1-14.